



extra

SHOTLINES



This is the story of one man's journey into the unknown; Pascal Bernabe wanted to go where no one had gone before and succeeded - reaching 330m under the ocean ...

IT'S THE MOMENT that Pascal Bernabe has been waiting for. He is sitting on a barge with 400m of water beneath him. At his feet is a large blue buoy which is attached to a 350m cord and carries a 50kg ballast that will plunge towards the abyss that awaits him.

Bernabe's team are busy preparing equipment around him - Hubert, Francois, Tono, Christian, Sophie and Frank of Ralf Tech - although he has already rigged-up his twin 18litre tanks with another 7litre tank of air which he will need to inflate his WR1 dry suit and the compact VBS double wings.

Finally his equipment (made up of seven decompression tanks) is ready. Together with Sophie, Pascal stops at 6m for a final verification - everything is fine and he purges his wing and sinks into the depths.

At 70m he suspends his tank filled with 18/50, switches to a 6/72 mix and accelerates his descent.

Since 1996 Bernabe has dived about fifteen times to depths between 150m and 174m; this allows him certain psychological comfort at such depths.

He passes the 200m mark - the third time since he started to dive deep; on this occasion though it appears to him as a mere formality since the objective is to go much deeper!

The shotline cord slips quickly through his gloves - too quickly! He needs all his concentration

To Go Where No One Has Gone Before

to clear his ears, pass the tanks to the large carabiner which belays him the cord and to inflate his Ralf Tech WR1 dry suit.

Bernabe arrives at the last tank of 20litres which is attached to the 250m label, but which is in fact at 265m because of the elasticity of the cord. It is marked with a cyalume stick, like all the deep tanks.

This is a difficult moment for the diver - he abandons his 20litre travel-mix of 6/72 which he has been breathing since 70m and starts to breathe on the bottom mix. He tries to do too many things at once and the High Pressures Nervous Syndrome sets in and he begins to experience light tremors and increased difficulty of concentration. Moreover the relay tank that he was supposed to attach slips on the cord and escapes him; things certainly didn't seem to be improving with depth.

He hardly notices the presence of the 300m label which should raise his attention. A flashlight flickers, signalling Bernabe to the deep zone, he reaches the 320m mark when a large deflagration occurs in his right ear - one of the lamps, attached to the helmet has imploded. All of a sudden, the stress that disappeared since he passed 70m returns and the voyage stops here at 330m - not bad!



Wish me luck!

Bernabe inflates his Custom Divers wings and begins to ascent.

At 265m he is happy to recover his first safety tank and it is here that he has the first of his short halts. The ascent then continues, but more slowly. At 215m he stops for a second

time while he switches to the second decompression tank. From here to the next tank at 165m Bernabe ascends at an even slower rate. His ear hurts less than expected and he feels comfortable on known ground. From 150m onwards, the ascent becomes extremely slow especially as the tanks start to accumulate around him. When he arrive at 70m he is in control of nine 20litre relay cylinders!

At 65m he switches to the second cord and meets with François Brun whom he informs about the pain in his ear and that he has slight nausea. After a long moment spent in one another's company, François makes his own ascent and takes four cylinders with him.

Hubert Foucart meets Bernabe at 50m who gives him water containing a medication against nausea. Denis is next to meet Bernabe with some vegetable soup that he drinks in giant syringes. Then, he brings a rebreather for Bernabe to wear, unfortunately it will not function and so the remainder of the ascent will be completed in open circuit.

From 30m onwards, Bernabe starts to feel the effects of the strong swell of the surface. The pain in his ear worsens and soon, each movement of the cord becomes a battle as decompression turns into torment.

Meanwhile, at the surface the swell has become stronger. Frank who is in charge of the surface cover and had remained on the boat is now facing waves more than 3m high!

The end of decompression is spent in the company of Christian, Pierre, Lolo, Théo, Francis and his wife Sylvaine who accompanies Bernabe to 3m and then to the surface after 8 hours and 47 minutes of diving!

The WR1 adventure is a total success. The team's objectives were met and everyone remained in good health. One question remains though: Which record could Bernabe beat next? He already has an idea...